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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN AND S/ES - CR

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN OFFICIALS EXPRESS CONDOLENCES FOR SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA

1. Post has received numerous expressions of condolences over the tragic loss of the Columbia and her crew. Phone calls, faxes, letters and e-mails expressing sorrow and solidarity have come from private citizens as well as Guatemalan officials. Noteworthy are letters from President Portillo, Foreign Minister Gutierrez, Supreme Court President Ochaita, Human Rights Ombudsman Morales, and UNE Congressman Flores.

2. While most expressions of condolence are addressed to the Ambassador, the Embassy or the American people in general, President Portillo's letter is addressed to President Bush. A signed original in Spanish will be delivered via the Guatemalan Embassy in Washington. In paragraph 3 we provide an unofficial translation of the text. Paragraph 4 is an unofficial translation of the text of Foreign Minister Gutierrez letter to Ambassador Hamilton.

3. Begin text of Portillo letter.
Mr. George W. Bush
President of the United States of America

Mr. President,

Greatly dismayed by the deaths of the crew of the shuttle Columbia, in my own name and in the name of the government and people of Guatemala, we all declare to you and to the people of the United States of America, our deepest regrets.

From the heart,

Alfonso Portillo
End text of Portillo letter.

4. Begin text of Gutierrez letter.
Honorable Mr. John Hamilton
Ambassador of the United States of America
Accredited in Guatemala

Mr. Ambassador,

It is with deep sorrow that I present my condolences to your government, the people of the United States, and especially the families of the astronauts: Commander Rick D. Husband, Pilot William C. McCool, Crewmembers Michael P. Anderson, David M. Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut, for the great loss to all humanity that the Columbia accident represents.

Those of us who have closely and enthusiastically followed each milestone in the expansion of scientific knowledge through the exploration of space, from the first experiments at the beginning of the last century (such as those of professor Robert Hutchings Goddard) to the flight of Alan Shepard in 1961, feel as if we have suffered a severe blow. But we know that progress is irreversible and that we will surely overcome this blow.

I take this opportunity to reiterate to the Ambassador assurances of my highest consideration.

Edgar Gutierrez
Foreign Minister
End text of Gutierrez letter.
Hamilton